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ANCIENT AMERICA

BY MRS. J. MITCHELL CLARK

"What is, lasts ever, past recall."—*Browning*.

HERE, in a faraway land, charmingly and appropriately called the Golden West, is a collection of gems set in "California Gold"—which symbolises the San Diego Exposition, in that the "gems" are the Spanish Colonial buildings in settings of the most luxurious tropical gardens conceivable. In one of these, surrounding the California State Building, I am writing this paper, hoping it may create an "atmosphere" for you as it does to all who have that love of the beautiful with which the Spaniard acknowledges his appreciation with the Sign of the Cross whenever he sees or hears a thing which his soul recognizes as divine inspiration.

The facade of this building is considered by experts the "clou" of the Exposition and its position is just at the left of the entrance through the famous "Ocean Gateway" in the wall surrounding the entire enclosure like the old walled cities of Spain.

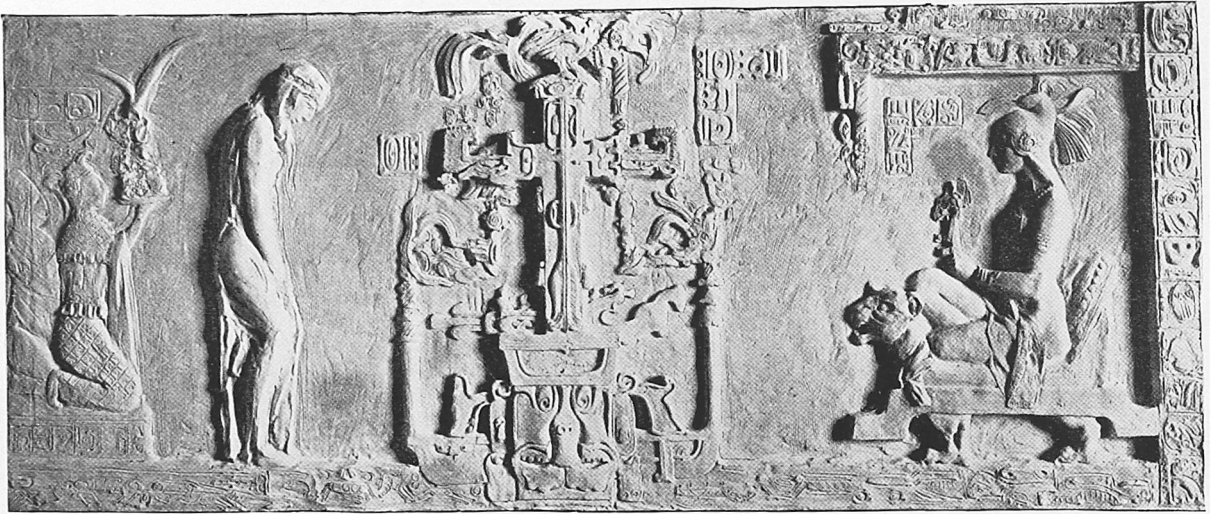
This gateway is through a Norman arch with a shield over the top center bearing a motto in Latin, which translated reads, "Always Watching, San Diego first port of call."

On the left side of this shield is a female figure, Mare Atlanticum, executed in bas-relief, and on the right a male figure, Mare Pacificum. Each is in a reclining posture holding a jug of water out of which they pour from the two oceans to meet below, symbolising

the uniting of them in the Panama Canal.

"He will never build a house of tiles" is an old Mexican saying of one who is profligate, but judging from the number which not only embellish but entirely construct the dome and tower of the California State Building mosaiced in wonderful design, one can easily imagine the wealth which is represented in the originals in Spain and Mexico from which this structure evolved. It forms a veritable jewelled ornament in the sky from every point of view in the surrounding country.

At the top of its superb facade is a full length statue of Father Junipero Serra, first President General of California. On his right is a bust of Philip III of Spain and on the left a bust of Carlos V of Spain. Below these are full length statues of Cabirillo, the first white explorer to land on these shores in 1542, and Viscaino who landed here in 1602. On either side of the great doorway are full length statues of Jaume on the right and De la Ascension on the left. The doors are of Philippine mahogany superbly carved by hand in the coat of arms of old Spain on one and that of the United States on the other, while over the top of this doorway is the seal of the exposition bearing the motto, "The land divided, the world united." Jaume was the first Christian martyr of California and De la Ascension the first Carmelite historian.



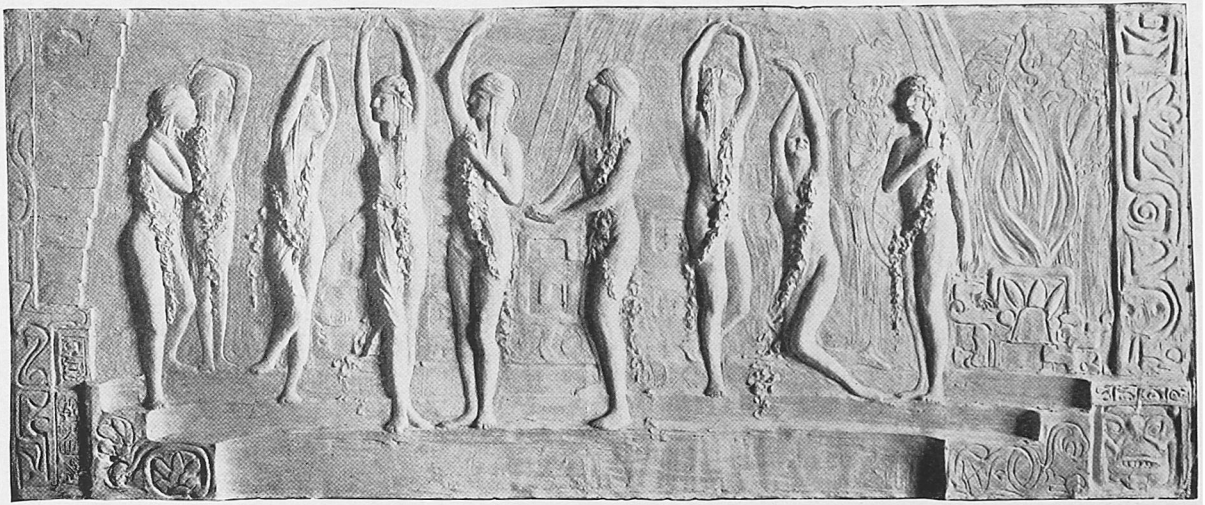
The Oracle. From Sculpture Frieze. By Mrs. Jean Beman Cooke-Smith

“Outside should suffice for evidence” of what this building contains. Here in this permanent monument of the exposition is enshrined by means of replicas in the original architecture—in palaces, temples and works of art—our only knowledge of the native American race. What we see in its decadence, the science of archæology has brought to light in its original vigour. To the readers who do not know Palenque about which no history has yet been written and its ancient civilisation that existed coeval with the Christian era and undoubtedly before, probably prior to the Pyramids of Egypt, the following facts gleaned from some of the great minds who have visited these almost unknown ruins of Central America are of paramount interest.

This collection and its object, is to present a picture of the golden age of the red race in America before the continent had been seen by Europeans. These ruins of Central America show an epoch of human history as worthy of study as its great contemporaries of the old world by which it was obviously in no way influenced. It is an-

cient America, the root of all things truly American and with which it behooves us as a nation to acquaint ourselves. It was a civilization of the greatest culture, this Maya race whose “active principle” was religion judging from the expressions in the ruins surviving of glorious temples, architecture and sculpture unrivalled anywhere.

Mr. Carlo Vierra an American painter accompanied an expedition to Yucatan to paint representations from the actual ruins themselves. These pictures which adorn the walls over the casts of the buildings, depict the construction and real colouring as well as the topographical situation of these excavated cities, one of them showing the Chichen Itza, the Holy City of Yucatan. (Chi signifies mouth and chen, wells, *i. e.*, “The mouth of the wells of the Itzas,” which explains the very appropriate name applied to the place by the people.) This was by far the most splendid of all the cities found by the Spanish conquerors and even in its desolation and ruins one is impressed by the sanctity of its traditions and evidences of indescribable wonder and magnificence



Itza Virgins Approaching the Sacred Well. From Sculpture Freize. By Mrs. Jean Beman Cooke-Smith

which existed there. Most interesting in Mr. Vierra's paintings and the plaster reproductions in miniature of the palaces, is the Mayan Arch.

It is absolutely original, beautifully proportioned and typically American, and its universal employment in the construction of edifices by the Mayas is a revelation to the layman of average intelligence like myself whose study of historic ornament did not include it. It is but one of the salient features of this people to inspire a wider knowledge of them.

"The Plumed Serpent Portal" is of exceeding interest, originality and beauty judging from the stupendous plaster reproduction. It is found at the entrance to the famous temple called The House of the Tigers at Chichen Itza as well as at the entrances of other massive temples. This particular serpent or "coatl" was their deity as rain god, the traditions about him having descended to most tribes of the American Indians who people our continent in Arizona and New Mexico—*i. e.* the Zuni, the Hopi, the Pueblo, the Apache, etc., and to this deity is their greatest

prayer—for rain. One can understand this, crossing the Painted Desert where one sees at long intervals of distance a sign telling how many miles one is from water.

We cross ourselves with the Spaniard when beholding the great Mayan sculpture frieze extending around the entire gallery of this museum and depicting religious rites and customs of the Mayas. It was designed and executed by Mrs. Jean Beman Cooke-Smith of New York. This artist spared nothing in her research and study regarding the aborigines of the Western Hemisphere.

The frieze consists of fifteen panels, each nine feet long and three feet wide or high, the development of which is accomplished in rather low relief and is placed here for permanent exhibition. It has been admired as an original work, an inspiration resulting from months of careful study and concentration. One panel represents "The Building of the Temple, Its Quarrying and Dedication." Another, "Carving and Setting up the Stone Monuments," with which the Mayas at certain intervals of time marked their progress.

Then there is "The Sacred Ball Game" which Mrs. Cooke-Smith interestingly described to me as a continuation of the rite called "The Sacrifice of the Virgins." This she also illustrates in two of the panels. The tradition is somewhat similar to that of the Vestal virgins.

A number of young maidens were chosen for exaltation as High Priestess. On the day arranged, they formed a procession for which they were clad in garlands of flowers. After being blindfolded, they marched silently and fearlessly to the Enchanted Well, or Cenote Sacra. There were two great wells in each of these great cities, the Cenote Grande and the Cenote Sacra. The former was used as the water supply for the city, the latter for religious observances exclusively. From far and near pilgrimages were made in Yucatan and even from points further away to the Sacred Cenote and the religious rites performed there were what gave to the city its holy character. The actual remains of this sacred Cenote still exist and can be seen in one of Mr. Carlo Vierra's paintings.

The procession of the Virgins started at daybreak and, as they proceeded, each one was precipitated into the well. She who survived until noon was rescued and became high priestess. In the panel the inner soul of each seems portrayed in physiognomy, mien and pose, some expressing terror, fear and dread, but the higher types showing hope, courage and ecstasy. The ancient symbolism of a well, signifies revealed truth. The surviving virgin is supposedly endowed by her immersion with all the knowledge requisite of her people to become their

"Oracle." In the next panel, accordingly, one sees the virgin standing before the lord of the city about to receive from him the emblems. In the background is the excited and enthusiastic populace, many bearing rich gifts to bestow upon her at the altar of the cross. This cross is surmounted by the Maya sacred bird called the quetzal. The tail feathers were of a brilliant greenish hue and worn as a head-dress on persons of high rank. The cross, the original of which is on a tablet in the temple of the cross at Palenque, signifies the four quarters of the world.

The "Sacred Ball Game" comes next in the sequence of panels. The game was played in a court nearly three hundred feet long and one hundred and nineteen feet wide. On each side of it were two parallel walls of solid masonry each two hundred and seventy-two feet long and twenty-seven feet high. High on the side of each and at the middle point as measured from end to end, was attached a stone ring four feet in diameter, with a hole in it large enough to allow of the ball passing through. These rings were fastened to the wall by stone tenons and placed so that the surface of each was perpendicular to the vertical face of the wall. The ball was made of caoutchouc and was projected by the wrist, elbow, or hip, but never with the hands. The object was to send it through the ring. The achievement was considered a miracle and the successful competitor regarded as a hero. As victor he could claim from the on-lookers their jewels, sashes or valuables. Accordingly, another panel shows him running after the people, who are attempting to disperse before ransom can be claimed.